

# The Brethren or Dunkers.

INCORPORATED

(German Baptist Brethren Church.)

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THE Brethren are a large body of Christians, whose faith and practice are not generally known outside of their immediate localities. The errors in the books that attempt to describe the BRETHREN, as they call themselves, have been both numerous and lamentable. Starting with Buck's "Theological Works" and ending with the ponderous encyclopedias and standard dictionaries, error after error is found, and the faith and practice of the church have been greatly misrepresented. The statements that the Brethren are celibates, that they discourage marriage, that they do not marry outside of their own Fraternity, that they keep the seventh day Sabbath, that they live in communities, and other similar errors, set forth in the books, always have been without foundation. These misstatements, to be found in nearly all the standard works, show a lack of care, in obtaining correct information, that is far from commendable.

## HISTORY.

Ever since the decline of Primitive Christianity in the early age of the church, God has had a people who protested against the departures from the usages of the apostolic church. The Brethren come in this line of succession, and

the movement which resulted in their closer organization grew out of the great religious awakening which occurred in Germany during the closing years of the seventeenth century, when large numbers, becoming dissatisfied with the lack of spirituality in the State Church, withdrew from its Communion and met together for the worship of God. They were called Separatists, or Pietists, and among them were to be found such men as Jacob Philip Spenner, Herman Francke, the founder of the Orphans' Home and School at Halle, Ernst Christian Hochman, Alexander Mack, and many other earnest, pious men whose names have become historical. The Pietists were bitterly persecuted by the Reformed and Catholic churches, and were driven from place to place until finally Count Cassimir, of Witgenstein, opened a place of refuge for the persecuted brethren in his province. Here, in the village of Schwarzenau, Alexander Mack, and others, similarly minded, met together to read and study God's Word. They mutually agreed to lay aside all existing creeds, confessions of faith, and catechisms, and search for the truth of God's Book, and, having found it, to follow it wherever it might lead them. They were led to adopt the New Testament as their creed and to declare in favor of a literal observance of all the commandments of the Son of God.

In 1708, a small company, that is to say eight souls, repaired to the river Eder and were buried with Christ in baptism, trine immersion being the mode used. The church was organized, and Alexander Mack was chosen as its first minister, but he has never been regarded as the founder of the church. The Brethren claim to follow only Christ, and, as they accept his Word as their rule of faith and practice, the claim is well founded. The infant church increased in numbers rapidly, but even in Witgenstein their peace was

soon disturbed, and, although they lived peaceful and harmless lives, the hand of persecution was laid heavily upon them. Mack, in company with Hochman, preached the Word of Truth in many parts of Germany, visiting Holland also. Here they met and formed the acquaintance of William Penn, who was at that time much interested in his colony in the new world. The Brethren were invited to settle in Pennsylvania, and, as they were sorely persecuted, the invitation was accepted.

In 1719 they commenced emigrating to America, and in less than ten years the entire church found itself quietly settled down in the vicinity of Germantown and Philadelphia. From this nucleus, formed in the New World, the church spread southward and westward, and flourishing congregations are now found in most of the States. They are, however, most numerous in Pennsylvania, Maryland, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Missouri, Nebraska and Kansas. At the Annual Conference held at Ottawa, Kan., in 1896, twenty-three States and four foreign countries, Denmark, Sweden, Asia Minor and India, were represented by delegates or by letter.

#### FAITH AND PRACTICE.

The Brethren hold the Bible to be the inspired and infallible Word of God, and accept the New Testament as their rule of faith and practice. In the subtleties of speculative theology the church takes but little interest. She is chiefly concerned in giving willing and cheerful obedience to the plain, simple commandments of Christ Jesus. The Brethren are, in every respect, evangelical in their faith. They believe in the Trinity, in the divinity of Christ and of the Holy Spirit, and in future rewards and punishments. Faith, repentance and baptism are held to be conditions of



salvation. These three constitute true evangelical conversion, and upon them rests the promise of the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Ghost.

#### BAPTISM.

Baptism is administered by trine immersion. After being instructed in the principles of the Gospel, and having faithfully promised to observe the same, the applicant is taken down into the water, and, kneeling, reaffirms his faith in Christ and promises to live faithful until death. He is then baptized for the remission of his sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; the administrator immersing the applicant face forward at the mention of each name in the Trinity. The administrator then lays his hands on the head of the kneeling candidate and offers a brief prayer in behalf of the one baptized, and he rises to be greeted as a brother, with the right hand of fellowship and the kiss of love, to walk in newness of life.

The Brethren follow closely the practice of the apostolic church, and admit none into fellowship until they have been baptized. In the language of Peter to the Pentecostians they tell all believers to "repent, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Acts 2: 38. Holding that baptism is only for believers, and those who have repented, they oppose infant baptism. Infants can neither believe nor repent, hence they are not proper subjects for baptism. Christ having sufficiently atoned for them, all children who die before coming to a knowledge of good and evil will be saved.

In defense of trine immersion they hold that the great commission, given by Christ, and recorded in Matt. 28: 19,

Revised Version, "Baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," teaches a threefold action. As there are three persons in the Trinity, each one of the Divine Three is honored in this form of baptism. As the three Persons constitute one God, and a belief in each of these one faith, so the three dippings constitute one baptism. In favor of their practice they have the testimony of all Greek scholars, who have examined the subject, the practice of the entire Greek church, and reliable history. These all show that trine immersion was the almost universal mode of baptism for centuries succeeding the apostolic age. Changes were gradually made from trine immersion to sprinkling, but the church that made the change, the Roman Catholic, still retains the three actions in applying water to the candidate. Nearly all the Protestant churches that practice sprinkling, retain the same form, thus testifying to the truth that the commission teaches a threefold action in baptism. Their baptism is accepted as valid by all religious denominations of any note whatever.

#### THE AGAPE, OR FEAST OF LOVE.

The evening before his death, our Blessed Master, after having washed his disciples' feet, ate a supper with them and instituted, in connection with this sacred meal, the Communion,—the bread and cup. The apostles, led by the Holy Spirit, followed the example of their Great Leader and introduced the *agape* into the apostolic church. This feast of love, of which all the Christians partook, was a full meal, was eaten in the evening, and is called by the apostle Paul the Lord's Supper. The Communion of the bread and wine was given in connection with this meal. The love-feast was kept up in the primitive church for four centuries, but as the church grew in numbers and wealth, it lost its first love and spirit of fraternity, and the

feasts of love were discontinued. The Brethren, in their reformatory movement in 1708 restored these love-feasts, and in this particular still follow the example of Christ and the practice of the apostles and primitive Christians, and keep the feast of love. A full meal is prepared and placed upon tables, used for that purpose, in the church, and all the members partake of the supper.

Before eating supper, the religious rite of washing feet is observed. Their authority for this practice is found in John 13: 1-17, "He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded. . . . If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you." The Brethren do not stand alone in the practice of this rite. The Greek church, with ninety million communicants, has adhered to feet-washing, as she claims, ever since the days of the apostles, and the patriarch of Jerusalem engages in feet-washing to-day near the spot where Jesus himself gave the example and the precept.

In their practice of the ordinance of feet-washing at love-feast occasions the Brethren follow very closely the example of the Master. Water is poured into a basin, a brother girds himself with a towel and washes and wipes his brother's bared feet, and in turn has his feet washed. The rite is in this way performed over the entire congregation. The sisters wash the sisters' feet and all the proprieties of the sexes are most rigidly observed. By this ordinance the Gospel principle of humility is set forth and by its observance all are placed on a common level. The rich and poor stand alike together in the great Brotherhood established by Christ.



After observing the ceremony of feet-washing, a blessing is asked upon the simple meal spread on the tables, and it is eaten with solemnity. It is held to be typical of the great supper at the end of the world, when Christ himself will be master of ceremonies. The important lesson is taught that we are all children of one common family, members of one common brotherhood, having one common purpose in view, and the bond of fraternity and loving fellowship is shown by eating together this sacred meal as did Christ and his disciples and as did the primitive Christians. At the conclusion of the meal thanks are returned and then, as the members are seated around the table, the right hand of fellowship and the kiss of charity are given. The salutation of the kiss of love in worship and in customary greetings, as enjoined by the apostles, is never observed between the sexes.

The Communion is then administered. This consists in partaking of the bread and wine in commemoration of the sufferings and death of our adorable Redeemer. In the Lord's Supper we are pointed forward to the evening of the world, to the great reunion of the saints. In the Communion we are pointed back to the cross. The emblems are passed from hand to hand by the brethren, while the officiating minister breaks the bread and passes the cup to the sisters. After this a season of earnest devotion follows, and then a hymn is sung and the services are closed for the evening. Love-feasts are held in each congregation usually once or twice each year, but as the members visit from congregation to congregation, during the love-feast season, they engage many times in this service during the year.

### **CHURCH GOVERNMENT.**

The Brethren have a republican form of church government. Each congregation is independent in the management of its local affairs, such as the election of deacons,

ministers, elders, or bishops, and in matters of local church discipline; but is subject to the entire Brotherhood through District and General Conferences. A number of congregations, usually in the same State, conveniently located, are formed into a District, and these hold annual conferences, to which each congregation sends two delegates, either lay-members, deacons, or ministers. Questions, local to the District, are discussed and settled by the District Conference, but those of a general character are sent to the General Conference, or Annual Meeting, as it is commonly called. This is also a delegated body. The Districts each elect one delegate, who must be an elder, to serve on the Standing Committee, and each congregation, with a membership of two hundred or less, may elect one delegate. Congregations with a larger membership may send two delegates. The delegates may be selected from the laity or the church officials. The Standing Committee and delegates form the official body of the Conference. Any member present may take part in the discussion of questions, but the voting is confined to the delegates, two-thirds of the votes cast being required for a decision.

The General Conference is also a great annual reunion for the Brethren. They come together from all parts of the Brotherhood, and it is not unusual for thousands of them to assemble at the place of Meeting.

The decisions of the Conference are to be adhered to by all the members of the church. An examination of the book of Minutes of the Annual Meeting shows that questions, referring to church doctrine, rarely come before the Conference, proving that there has been a firm adherence to the principles of the Gospel, as originally adopted by the church. But the application of those principles, in special cases, and the best means to carry them into effect, have been subjects of frequent discussion and decision by the



Conference. The tendency of the Conference and the annual reunions is to unify the Brethren in all their church work, and it is a fact that there is rarely found so large a body of religious people so closely united on the doctrines and principles to which they hold.

Elders, ministers and deacons are elected by the church from among her members, such as she may deem qualified for the important work to which they are called. Each member, without reference to sex, has a right to cast a vote. Ministers, after giving full proof of their faithfulness and ability, are advanced to the "second degree" of the ministry. They are then authorized to baptize, solemnize marriage, and make and fill appointments for preaching the Word. Elders, or bishops, who preside over the congregations, are chosen from the ministers in the second degree. No salaries are paid, but poor ministers, and those who are sent out as missionaries, are properly supported.

#### A PECULIAR PEOPLE.

The Brethren claim to be, and are, in many respects, a peculiar people. Plain dressing is taught and required, and a general uniformity is observed, but this is regarded as a means to an end. They believe that the New Testament teaches plainness in attire, 1 Tim. 2: 9, 10; 1 Pet. 3: 3, and that, by a general uniformity of habit, marked enough to distinguish the church from the world, Gospel plainness may be made a living fact instead of a dead letter, as it has become in many other churches whose discipline strongly insists on plain dressing.

The Brethren are not allowed to go to law with one of their own number, nor with others, without first asking the counsel of the church, and it is rare indeed for a brother to be engaged in a lawsuit. Among themselves differences are adjusted personally, or by the church, in accordance with the Christian law of trespass given by the Master.

Matt. 18: 15-20. The Fraternity is strictly non-resistant, as well as non-litigant. It is held that Christ is the "Prince of Peace," that his Word is "the Gospel of Peace," hence his servants can not go to war and fight. "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds." 2 Cor. 10: 4. They take no active part in politics, and "swear not at all." If called upon to testify in the courts, they simply affirm, without raising the hand or kissing the Bible. In this they literally obey the command of Christ who said, "Swear not at all. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil." Matt. 5: 34-37. No brother may become a member of any secret or oathbound society, the Brethren holding that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is fully sufficient for all the wants of humanity. All the converts who are identified with such orders are required to sever their connection with them before they can be adopted into the family of the Brotherhood.

The Brethren hold that the marriage bond can only be dissolved by death. Divorce and re-marriage are practically unknown among the membership. It is held by some that those who have been divorced for a violation of the sanctity of the marriage vow and re-married before conversion, might be received into church fellowship while their former companions were living, but the rule has been against even this much leniency, and they hold, with Paul, that the woman which hath a husband is bound by law to her husband so long as he liveth: but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband." Rom. 7: 2.

They, in compliance with the instruction of the apostle James, 5: 14, 15, anoint the sick with oil. This rite is administered only by the request of the sick. The elders are called and the sick member is raised to a sitting posture. The elder applies the oil to the head three times, saying,

"Thou art anointed in the name of the Lord unto the strengthening of thy faith, unto the comforting of thy conscience, and unto a full assurance of the remission of thy sins." The elders then lay their hands on the head of the sick, and offer a prayer for the anointed one.

The church keeps her poor, each congregation looking after her own who may become needy. If a single congregation becomes burdened, she may call for assistance upon her sister congregation, and in this way the needed help is obtained. As members of one common family, all are held by the Fraternity as brethren and sisters entitled to support, both moral and physical, in time of need. They are generous in their hospitality and show much of the spirit of the Master in the practice of this Christian virtue.

On the question of temperance and prohibition the Brethren have, for more than a century, given no uncertain testimony. They are one of the oldest temperance organizations in the United States. More than 100 years ago a decision was passed, forbidding any of the members to engage in the manufacture or sale of intoxicants. They forbid the use of all alcoholic or malt liquors as a beverage, in public or private. They request the members not even to have dealings with saloon-keepers. They discourage the use of tobacco, and the rule is that no brother can be installed in office who uses tobacco without making a promise to quit it. All applicants for baptism, who are addicted to the tobacco habit, are advised to abstain from its use before they are received into church fellowship.

The Fraternity is largely engaged in agricultural pursuits, but men and women in other departments of human endeavor may be found enrolled among its members.

Seven schools or colleges are in successful operation, over which the church has a supervisory control. The schools are located at Huntingdon, Pa., Mt. Morris, Ill., Bridgewater, Va., McPherson, Kan., Lordsburg, Cal., North



Manchester, Ind., and Fruitdale, Ala. The church has a well organized Missionary and Tract Society. The Society is controlled by a Committee of five, appointed by the Conference, known as the General Missionary and Tract Committee. The *Gospel Messenger*, the Church organ, two Sunday School papers, and Sunday School quarterlies are published by the Committee. All the profits arising from these publications are used in Mission work at home or abroad. The *Messenger* is a large and well-edited religious weekly, circulating in nearly every State and Territory in the Union, and also in Canada, Europe, Asia Minor and India.

The Brethren are well known as a quiet, peaceable, unassuming people. Habits of strict economy prevail amongst them, and, by their adherence to plainness in dress and living, they are, as a rule, well-to-do, and are able to meet their obligations. They enjoy an enviable reputation for honesty in the communities where they live. They manifest a strong devotion to the Bible and are consistently laboring to live out the principles and the spirit of the Man of Sorrows. The church in general has not, as yet, felt the withering influence of worldlyism within her borders. Caste distinctions and differences, born of human pride, have not entered her doors. Rich and poor, high and low, meet alike as one common family in Christ and the fraternal sentiment is largely developed in her membership. The church has been richly blessed of God and is in a prosperous condition; and before her there is opening a great field for work, in promulgating the principles of primitive and apostolic Christianity,—a work that must be pleasing to her Great Head and that will bring to her a continuation of the divine favor and blessings.

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